

Kobolds: Playing to Their Strengths

Races of the Dragon Web Enhancement #2

by Kolja Raven Lquette



The following web enhancement adds to material from January's [Races of the Dragon](#), as well as our previous web enhancement [Of Traps and Perfection](#) -- which presented new kobold traps plus the optional kobold paragon. In this enhancement, we look to expand on the kobolds' repertoire, including variant racial traits along with new weapons, rituals, and feats!



One of the most important factors when creating additional material for kobolds is that the charm of these reptilian humanoids is not their physical power, but their unmistakable lack of it. Kobolds should be in no danger of losing the weaknesses that define their race; rather than shoring up their infirmities, however, what we can do is play to their strengths.

Where they come up short: In a game where NPC Challenge Ratings are calculated at class level -1, NPC Challenge Ratings for kobolds are calculated at class level -3. Looking at the math, it's easy to assume that PC kobolds are underpowered as well. With a total Strength and Constitution penalty of -6 against a Dexterity bonus of +2, perceived game imbalances are readily pointed out. While kobolds enjoy a +1 natural armor bonus, that really only offsets 2 points worth of ability score penalties, leaving a -2 deficit. Maneuverability plays a big role in combat, wherein kobolds are faster than most other creatures their size (having a speed of 30 feet), but they also suffer from light sensitivity, knocking them down again.

Why coming up short is a good thing ... for kobolds: For some reason, people almost willfully take up the role of kobolds despite their weaknesses, citing that the challenge of playing a physically weak race can be more rewarding than a powerhouse character. Time and again, these PC kobolds not only defy their shortcomings, but rise above them, enduring in memory and level long after most characters have been forgotten (or destroyed). It's hard not to root for the underdog, whether playing or watching one, as people are naturally moved by an unlikely hero railing against dismaying odds ... especially when the odds should be too daunting for them to overcome. The moment kobolds lose the qualities that make their life expectancy dubious at best is the moment we stop fighting for their survival.





Races of the Dragon introduced Craft (trapmaking) as a class skill for all kobolds. While this really only impacted NPCs and prestige class levels, it does help define the outlook of all kobolds. Below are some variant racial traits, followed by additional game material for any campaign setting. This material was designed to shore up the plight of kobolds, but without exceeding their Level Adjustment of +0 (or perhaps simply attain that rating).

Variant Kobold Racial Traits

- **Natural Weapons:** Kobolds have two primary claw attacks that deal 1d3 points of slashing damage plus Strength bonus, and a secondary bite attack that deals 1d3 points of piercing damage plus 1/2 Strength bonus. Despite possibly being the weakest reptilian humanoid, kobolds retain a connection to their feral nature.

Design Notes

While this article does not come out and say that 1st level kobold characters (applying the core classes) are more accurately CR 1/2 creatures, the evidence presents itself. Despite how powerful natural weapons may seem in the hands of most characters, this ability does not hold up to aggressive min-maxing with kobold PCs.

For example, an elite array kobold fighter will have 11 Strength and, if lucky enough to hit with each one of these natural weapons, will deal an average of 4 points of damage ($1.5 \times 3 = 4.5$ rounded down). The kobold fighter would be better off attacking with a Small greataxe or Small greatsword, both of which enjoy superior critical ratings. Adding a claw/claw/bite attack routine doesn't push them out of the CR +0 category.

Moreover, giving kobolds natural weapons completes their reptilian humanoid heritage, as virtually every other reptilian humanoid, Small and Large, have a claw/claw/bite attack routine. Lizardfolk (standard, blackscale, and poison dusk), and the troglodyte all have these natural weapons.

Looking at the poison dusk lizardfolk in particular, the closest approximation to kobolds, they are a +1 Level Adjustment race, and rightly so. Poison dusk lizardfolk enjoy +2 Dexterity, +2 Constitution, -2 Charisma, and +3 natural armor. No Strength penalty for being Small, no light sensitivity, 30 feet of movement (again, despite being Small), and a +5 Hide bonus for their chameleon ability (on top of their size bonus). The kobold is in no danger of stepping on their feet, even with a variant natural weapons ability.

- **Slight Build:** The physical stature of kobolds lets them function in many ways as if they were one size category smaller. Whenever a kobold is subject to a size modifier or special size modifier for an opposed check (such as Hide), the kobold is treated as one size smaller if doing so is advantageous to the character. A kobold is also considered to be one size smaller when "squeezing" through a restrictive

space. A kobold can use weapons designed for a creature one size smaller without penalty. However, the space and reach of a kobold remain those of a creature of their actual size. The benefits of this racial trait stack with the effects of powers, abilities, and spells that change the subject's size category.

- **Weapon Proficiency:** Kobolds receive the Martial Weapon Proficiency feats for the heavy pick and light pick as bonus feats. Kobolds are born and bred miners, regardless of their actual profession, allowing them to easily wield these weapons.
- **Weapon Familiarity:** Kobolds may treat greatpicks (see below) as martial weapons, rather than exotic weapons.

Kobold Weapons

Leave it to kobolds to get the most from any weapon. If there's a slight advantage to be gained from a tool, whether mining or attacking from great distances, kobolds will exploit that improvement.

Exotic Weapons	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Range Increment	Weight(1)	Type
<i>Two-Handed Weapons</i>							
Greatpick	15 gp	1d8	1d10	x4	--	15 lb.	Piercing
<i>Ranged Weapons</i>							
Double crossbow, hand	200 gp	1d3	1d4	19-20/x2	30 ft.	3 lb.	Piercing
Bolts (10)	1 gp	--	--		--	1 lb.	--
Double crossbow, heavy	100 gp	1d8	1d10	19-20/x2	120 ft.	12 lb.	Piercing
Bolts (10)	1 gp	--	--		--	1 lb.	--
Double crossbow, light	70 gp	1d6	1d8	19-20/x2	80 ft.	6 lb.	Piercing
Bolts (10)	1 gp	--	--		--	1 lb.	--

1 Weight figures are for Medium weapons. A Small weapon weighs half as much, and a Large weapon weighs twice as much.

Weapon Qualities

These weapons require the Exotic Weapon Proficiency to wield without taking a -4 penalty on attack rolls, but taking Exotic Weapon Proficiency (double crossbow) makes a character proficient in the use of all double crossbows. The penalty for wielding a hand crossbow without proficiency is cumulative with the penalty for wielding a double crossbow without proficiency.





Weapon Descriptions

Double Crossbow, Hand: A hand double crossbow functions like a regular crossbow of the same type, but is constructed with a second crossbow above the foregrip. Individually loading each hand crossbow takes a move action that provokes an attack of opportunity. It takes a full-round action to load both hand crossbows.

A character can fire one of the two crossbows as an exotic weapon (hand crossbow) with a standard action, or both crossbows as an exotic weapon (hand crossbow) with a full round action (using multiple attacks gained from a high base attack bonus). A character with exotic weapon (double crossbow) training can fire both crossbows as a full-round action using their highest base attack bonus, but each attack takes a -2 penalty.

You can shoot a hand double crossbow with each hand, but you take a penalty on attack rolls as if attacking with two light weapons (see Table 8-10: Two Weapon Fighting Penalties, page 160 of the *Player's Handbook*). This penalty is cumulative with the penalty for one-handed firing.

Double Crossbow, Heavy: A heavy double crossbow functions like a regular crossbow of the same type, but is constructed with a second crossbow above the foregrip. Individually loading each heavy crossbow takes a full-round action that provokes an attack of opportunity. It takes two full-round actions to load both heavy crossbows.

A character can fire one of the two crossbows as a simple weapon with a standard action, or both crossbows as a simple weapon with a full round action (using multiple attacks gained from a high base attack bonus). A character with exotic weapon (double crossbow) training can fire both crossbows as a full-round action using their highest base attack bonus, but each attack takes a -2 penalty.

A heavy double crossbow can be fired with one hand, but with a -6 penalty. You can shoot a heavy double crossbow with each hand, but you take a penalty on attack rolls as if attacking with two one-handed weapons (see Table 8-10: Two Weapon Fighting Penalties, page 160 of the *Player's Handbook*). This penalty is cumulative with the penalty for one-handed firing.

Double Crossbow, Light: A light double crossbow functions like a regular crossbow of the same type, but is constructed with a second crossbow above the foregrip. Individually loading each light crossbow takes a move action that provokes an attack of opportunity. It takes a full-round action to load both light crossbows.

A character can fire one of the two crossbows as a simple weapon with a standard action, or both crossbows as a simple weapon with a full round action (using multiple attacks gained from a high base attack bonus). A character with exotic weapon (double crossbow) training can fire both crossbows as a full-round action using their highest base attack bonus, but each attack takes a -2 penalty.

A light double crossbow can be fired with one hand, but with a -4 penalty. You can shoot a light double crossbow with each hand, but you take a penalty on attack rolls as if attacking with two light weapons (see Table 8-10: Two Weapon Fighting Penalties, page 160 of the *Player's Handbook*). This penalty is cumulative with the penalty for one-handed firing.

Design Notes

Taking the Exotic Weapon Proficiency (double crossbow) grants no more attacks with a double crossbow than firing a double crossbow twice with a high base attack bonus. The difference is that with the Exotic Weapon Proficiency, both attacks are at your highest base attack bonus, but with a -2 penalty; whereas using the second attack from a high base attack bonus comes with a -5 penalty. For example, a 6th level fighter with Exotic Weapon Proficiency (double crossbow) attacks with a +4/+4, while a 6th level fighter (without with the Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat) can attack with a +6/+1 base attack bonus. The advantage of taking Exotic Weapon Proficiency (double crossbow) is there, and just powerful enough to justify the feat. Taking the Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat for double crossbows essentially offers a benefit identical to the Rapid Shot feat.

Greatpick: A greatpick is an extension of the heavy and light pick designs, but considerably heavier and larger, concentrating twice as much force onto a small area with a two-handed heft.

Kobold Religion

In the same way that every core race has a self-named domain from which to choose (see Appendix of the *Spell Compendium*), so now do kobolds.



Kobold Domain

Deities: Kurtulmak.

Granted Power: You can use the Search skill to locate traps when the task has a Difficulty Class higher than 20. You can use the Disable Device skill to disarm magic traps. A cleric with the Kobold domain who beats a trap's DC by 10 or more with a Disable Device check can study a trap, figure out how it works, and bypass it (with their party) without disarming it.

Add Disable Device and Search to your list of cleric class skills.

Kobold Domain Spells

1 Create Trap (1): Creates a CR 1 trap.

2 Gnome Blight (1): Cloud of itchy debilitating pollen sickens living creatures.

3 Fire Trap(M): Opened object deals 1d4 damage +1/level.

4 Stone Sphere (2): 5-ft. diameter stone sphere rolls over your enemies.

5 Transmute Rock to Mud: Transforms two 10-ft. cubes per level.

6 Contingency(F): Sets trigger condition for another spell.

7 Ironguard(F) (2): Subject becomes immune to all metal.

8 Maze: Traps subject in extradimensional maze.

9 Transmute Rock to Lava (2): Transforms one 10-ft. cube with subsequent fire damage and effects.

(1) *Races of the Dragon*

(2) *Spell Compendium*

Kobold Ritual

The Draconic Rite of Passage (see page 43 of *Races of the Dragon*) is a ritual that grants any kobold who completes the rite a 1st-level sorcerer spell-like ability of their choice, usable once per day. To recharge this ability, a kobold must complete the Searching for the Dragon meditation each day, which equates to same amount of time a sorcerer must spend concentrating to replenish their spells. The following ritual (and associated feat) are extensions of the Draconic Rite of Passage.



Greater Draconic Rite of Passage

The Greater Draconic Rite of Passage is a powerful ritual handed down from dragons to kobolds as a reward for their undying loyalty. In the same way that chromatic and metallic dragons gain integrated levels of sorcerer spellcasting as they age, this ritual allows kobolds to awaken a small amount of their own arcane might.

Prerequisites: Only kobolds of 6 Hit Dice or more, sorcerer level 1st, who have successfully completed the Draconic Rite of Passage, and taken Draconic Reservoir (1) can undergo the Greater Draconic Rite of Passage. A kobold requires no one else to perform the rite; it is a solitary activity.

(1) See below for feat description.

Benefit: Upon completing this rite, a kobold gains new spells per day and an increase in caster level (and spells known) as if also gaining one level in the sorcerer class. The kobold does not, however, gain any other benefit a sorcerer would have gained (familiar abilities, and so on).

The benefit of this ritual is automatically factored into the 15 minutes that a kobold sorcerer spends concentrating to ready their daily allotment of spells. No kobold can benefit from this rite more than once.

Time: A kobold who undergoes this rite must first endure nine days of fasting (the equivalent of three days for a kobold in a region above 40 degrees F). Immediately thereafter, the kobold must succeed on a DC 20 Concentration check to enter a deep trance that lasts for 24 hours. If the check fails, the rite must begin anew.

Cost: This rite requires sacrificing a gem of at least 1,000 gp in value. The kobold also permanently loses 3 hit points upon completion of the rite, the price of unlocking latent draconic energy within their soul.

Kobold Feat

This feat lets kobolds increase the number of daily castings for their Draconic Rite of Passage spell-like ability (see page 43 of *Races of the Dragon*). It is also a prerequisite for the Greater Draconic Rite of Passage (see above for description).

Draconic Reservoir

You can cast your Draconic Rite of Passage spell-like ability more often than normal.

Prerequisite: Kobold, must have completed the Draconic Rite of Passage, 3 HD.

Benefit: You can cast your 1st-level sorcerer spell-like ability gained from Draconic Rite of Passage 3/day. A kobold must complete the Searching for the Dragon meditation in order to recharge their spell-like ability, but does not have to increase the 15 minute duration for the additional castings.

Normal: The spell-like ability gained from Draconic Rite of Passage can only be cast 1/day.

About the Author

Kolja Raven Lquette is perhaps best known for creating *The Waking Lands* website, but has also co-authored *Races of the Dragon* and *Weapons of Legacy*, in addition to providing material for *Five Nations*, the upcoming *Complete Mage*, and various articles and enhancements for the Wizards of the Coast website.

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